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HOME

MOUNTAIN LIVING + ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN



Home Building Basics

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WHAT HOMEOWNERS SHOULD CONSIDER BEFORE BREAKING GROUND



COURTESY OF HIGHLINE PARTNERS / PHOTO BY GIBSON PHOTOGRAPHY

Annual snowfall and weather patterns are elements to consider before building.

WHILE BUILDING A NEW HOME — and bringing all of your design dreams to life — may sound like an exciting venture, there’s a lot more to it than some might imagine. Popular design shows and magazines tend to make the process look fairly simple, however significant preparation and a few extra steps can make all the difference for a new project’s success.

For Todd Thesing, a founding principal of the Bozeman, Montana-based custom home building company Highline Partners, the Greater Yellowstone area presents unique building opportunities that, like those in any location, should be considered in the construction plan. Before building, he and his team consider things like annual snowfall and geology, as well as the availability of building resources in more remote mountain towns. And Thesing — whose company

specializes in sustainable building practices — typically capitalizes on the use of local materials and the skills of local artisans and tradespeople, often including these specialists in a project’s construction team.

With 30-plus years of experience in the building industry, Thesing also helps educate his clients on the overall home-building process to ensure that they know what to expect along the way. Here, Thesing outlines his top recommendations for success:

Choosing the Design and Build Team

Thesing suggests an integrated approach to building custom homes, beginning with the selection of your team. Ask around for the names of quality builders and designers, and during the vetting process, he recommends looking at their

past projects and the typical building styles of each firm to make sure they align with your taste. Meeting prospective team members in person can also ensure that your personalities and goals match with theirs. Thesing says it’s important to select an architect and contractor simultaneously and right out of the gate, so they can collaborate from the get-go. This also gives homeowners a better understanding of costs and functionality.

Understanding the Landscape

Thesing recommends working with a build team that’s prepared to assess the geologic features of an area. For instance, in the region he works in, close to Yellowstone National Park’s geothermal features, small earthquakes are common and are taken into account. “Local knowledge, or an understanding of what’s going on locally, is really important,” he says. Thesing suggests requesting a report to assess your lot’s soil stability and type, also taking into

account whether it’s located in a wetland or low-lying area. Understanding the land, he says, means that future homeowners can also understand how nature might affect the design of the structure and the building process.

Siting the Home

For those building a home in this area, views are a priority, but Thesing says it’s also imperative to consider the home’s orientation and aspect in relation to the sun, both in the summer and winter. “This allows you to maximize passive solar heat in the winter, minimize sun exposure in the summer, and ensure views of dramatic sunrises and sunsets,” he says. In addition, Thesing recommends thinking about the placement of the driveway and how that affects the experience of coming home and leaving. This involves considering how quickly you want to arrive, what feelings you want to conjure on your approach, and how things like snow might affect accessibility.

Managing Expectations

Thesing encourages homeowners to adopt a craftsman’s eye and embrace the beauty of the creative process. Some homeowners desire absolute perfection, but he explains that, in reality, humans are designing the architecture and putting the home together by hand, which can lead to slight imperfections. While build teams work to create a home that is on point, he explains that the elements that remind us it was made by hand are the signatures of a custom home. “We don’t live in a perfect world,” he says, “so the assumption that everything is going to be perfect can lead to unrealistic and unmet expectations.”

Avoiding Trends

Among the top mistakes that Thesing sees is the tendency for homeowners to succumb to the newest fads. In some instances, they might try a new trendy style or product, then a year later, after living in their home, realize it wasn’t a good choice. “Know your own style and think about timelessness,” he says. •



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